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# **“I don't really know what the magic wand is to get yourself in there”: Women's sense of organizational fit as coach developers**

## **Abstract**

Building on the body of research that has addressed the experiences of female coaches, the present study examines women's role as coach developers. English football served as the context for the research. Figures demonstrate women are underrepresented in this role more so than they are as coaches, and their distribution across the coach developer pathway is unevenly balanced, with most women qualified at level one of the pathway. Using the concept of 'organizational fit', the research connects the experiences of the ten coach developers interviewed, to the structural practices of their national and local governing bodies. These practices were symptomatic of the organizations' culture that is created and upheld by masculine ideals. Work expectations and the environment were structured on the image of men as coaches and coach developers. Cultural barriers to women's sense of organizational fit were specifically found to be: the incentive to progress (return on investment from higher coaching qualifications), the degree of organizational support and nurture, and the opportunity to progress and practice. Consequently, organizational expectations and values do not support the ambitions of women to climb the coach developer career ladder, and restrict their sense of choice and control. Future research should direct its attention towards a greater interrogation of aspects of sport organizational culture that may serve to 'push' female coaches away from its core, or alternatively, pull them closer to engage and make use of their expertise and abilities as coach developers.

## Introduction

In the UK, the setting for the present study, the popularity of sport coaching has grown so much so that the size of the coaching workforce has increased to over 1.3 million people being classed as regular, active coaches delivering coaching to over seven million participants each week (Sports Coach UK, 2016). The qualified base of coaches has also grown over the last ten years and is now 70% of the total workforce (Sports Coach UK, 2016). Yet, while numbers have improved, the balance of representation within the profession in regards to gender has not. Indeed, recent statistics from UK Coaching, the UK's central agency for the recruitment and progression of coaches, reveal instead an *increase* in the number of men in the profession to 70% in 2016 from 62% in 2006, and men represent over 82% of *qualified* coaches, that is, coaches that are qualified to deliver the level of coaching at which they are working (Sports Coach UK, 2016). Particular groups of men and women as coaches, also continue to remain underrepresented, such as coaches with a disability or those who self-identify as Black or Minoritised Ethnic (Sports Coach UK, 2016).

But this paper is not another example of research to add to the burgeoning body of literature documenting women's underrepresentation just as coaches, or their often more negative experiences in the profession, or another paper that delves into possible reasons into why the sport coaching profession is so imbalanced when it comes to different groups of women compared to men. We have a considerable amount of knowledge in these areas due to a rich body of existing research (e.g. Allen & Shaw, 2013; Barker-Ruchti, Lindgren, Hofmann, Sinning, & Shelton, 2014; Burton & LaVoi, 2016; Carter-Francique & Olushola, 2016; Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska, 2010; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Norman, Rankin-Wright, & Allison, 2018; Shaw & Allen, 2009). Instead, the focus of this present study is on women's role in another level of sport organizations and within the coaching workforce: that of coach *educator*, more commonly referred to in the UK

as “coach developer”. Coach developers are a crucial part of a coach’s learning and development journey, acting as leader, facilitator, mentor, assessor, and course designer and evaluator (International Council for Coaching Excellence, 2014; McQuade & Nash, 2015).

Previous studies have found a gender imbalance in leadership and managerial roles creates organizational cultures that are hostile or resistant to women (Acker, 1990; Allen & Shaw, 2013; Kanter, 1977; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Norman et al., 2018; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). When there is a numerical imbalance, the culture of that organizational can bias masculinity and men, placing extra burdens on women of visibility and performance, devaluing their contribution, competencies, and worth, and fails to consistently recognise, reward, nurture, and support their development and progression (Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2011; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016). Within the sport literature, there is a growing awareness and interest in the way organizational culture constructs and reconstructs women’s experiences of coaching. Previous studies have documented the influential structural factors that can impact female coaches’ professional experiences and development. These include fewer opportunities to practice or learn, unequal gender relations, unequal ideas of coaching competency, lower self-confidence due to their marginal status, poorer working conditions, and homophobia (Allen & Shaw, 2013; Burton & LaVoi, 2016; Kamphoff et al., 2010; Norman, 2008, 2012b; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Norman et al., 2018; Robertson, 2016; Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2012). Nevertheless, these findings relate to women as coaches. What is almost absent within the literature are the experiences of women working in an alternative role within coaching – that of coach educator, to be referred to as coach developer from herein. There is only one example of research in this subject area which has examined how different tenets of organizational culture support women as coach developers as well as women as coaches (Norman et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the focus was

not explicitly on coach developers and it did not specifically ‘unpack’ how women experience this specific role in relation to the role demands and context of their sport.

The purpose of this paper will be to provide an in-depth exploration of how women experience the role of coach developer; the first of its kind to address this issue in the research literature. The case for connecting organizational culture with gendered experiences is a compelling one (Cassell & Walsh, 1997; Longman, Daniels, Bray, & Liddell, 2018; Murray & Syed, 2010). It is such cultural assumptions that often underpin expectations, beliefs, habits, and perceptions of men and women, and then shape behaviours and actions in the workplace (Schein, 2004). Women’s role as coach developers is an under-researched area and yet previous studies have shown that the responsibility and significance of the role is such that these individuals can have long-lasting impacts on coach experience and education (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2013). As we do not know much as to how this role is gendered, the present study will map what are the key issues experienced by women coach developers. This paper represents a ‘discovery piece’; documenting these findings for the first time. To do this, the concept of “organizational fit” is utilised to analyse the level of comfort or discomfort that female coach developers may feel within their NGB. First, I contextualise the research within a specific sporting context: English football, before discussing in greater depth, the broader role and significance of coach developers from a UK perspective. I then present the concept of ‘organizational fit’ (Cassell & Walsh, 1994) in relation to the present study.

### **The context: English football**

Part of the purpose of the present study was to understand women’s experiences as coach developers within a specific sporting context. The context that provides the backdrop to the research in this case, is English football. To become a coach in this context, there are three coaching qualification strands available, including the youth coaching pathway, the

goalkeeping coaching pathway, and the main, core pathway (The Football Association, 2017). The core strand includes five levels of qualification from level one, level two, UEFA B license (level three), UEFA A license (level four), and the highest qualification is the UEFA Pro Licence. Members of the coach education workforce delivering these courses to coaches at the various points of the pathway are known as coach developers. At the time of the research, coaches (men or women) were permitted onto the coach developer pathway once they have been a UEFA B licensed coach for a minimum of two years.

In terms of representation across the coaching pathway, as it stands, English football has an over-representation of male coaches in comparison to a lack of all groups of female coaches at every stage of the qualification process. As of 2015, statistics reveal an average 75% drop-off in the number of women at each stage of this core coaching pathway (The Football Association, 2015). This then impacts the numbers of women entering the coach developer pathway. At the time of research, figures showed the number of level one qualified female coach developers to be 40, falling to five at level two, three at level three and one at level four. This represented an 87% decline between levels one and two, a 40% decrease between levels two and three, and a 66% between levels three and four. Overall, the dropout in number of women coach developers progressing through the pathway from levels one to four was 97%. Therefore, the research sought to understand how they experienced their sense of ‘organizational fit’ being in such a minority position.

### **The significance of the coach developer: A UK perspective**

Within the UK, the role of the sports coach has undergone scrutiny in the last two decades as part of various governmental drives to professionalize the role (Taylor & Garratt, 2010). Due to governmental investment in coach development and learning, many NGBs now have in place a coach development model (CDM) to support the education and continued

professional development of their coaches (McQuade & Nash, 2015). Coach development is offered at all four stages of the UKCC and the coach education workforce has become a crucial part of delivering this model (McQuade & Nash, 2015).

A key part and focus of raising professional UK coaching standards has been on coach development and learning, and this too has remained the focus of much of the academic interest in sports coaching, primarily on learning sources and environments of coaches (North, 2010). This body of research has concluded that coaches utilise a variety mix of informal, non-formal and formal sources of learning (Chesterfield, Potrac, & Jones, 2010; Piggott, 2012; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2017). Coaches place the greatest value on informal sources of learning, such as from observing more experienced coaches, or a relationship with a mentor (North, 2010). One crucial element of this learning process has been cited to be the role of the coach developer (McQuade & Nash, 2015). This individual, as part of a coach education workforce within an NGB, has various responsibilities and roles can vary. There is a large workforce working in English football of approximately 1,000 ‘tutors’ which include staff specialising in medical, safeguarding, referees and coach education. The focus of the present study was on the group of coach education tutors within the tutor workforce, known as coach developers. The role is to support the professional development and practice of football coaches at all levels of the coaching pathway, delivered through formal coaching courses and one-to-one support during coaching sessions and personalised development plans for coaches (Abraham, 2016). There are just over 400 affiliate coach developers working in English football, with an additional team of full-time coach developers extra to this figure. Of the 400 affiliate coach developers, approximately 350 are qualified to teach coaches enrolled on the levels one and two qualification courses. Coach developers are required to possess appropriate technical knowledge of the sport, model good coaching practice to learner coaches, demonstrate a variety of teaching styles that are inclusive and engaging of both

individuals and groups, and provide concurrent and summative feedback to learner coaches (The Football Association, 2013). On average, each affiliated coach developer leads approximately three-five courses annually within their respective county to whom they are affiliated.

As already stated, the role of the coach education workforce has become a crucial component of the CDM. Yet, to date, there is very little research and writing into the experiences of coach developers beyond ‘what they do’ (e.g. Abraham, 2016; Brasil, Ramos, Milistetd, Culver, & do Nascimento, 2018; McQuade & Nash, 2015; North, 2010). We know very little about the people who fulfil these roles within particular sporting contexts and even less how their experiences within a sporting national governing body, are mediated by the organizational and the personal.

### **Women’s sense of organizational fit**

The underrepresentation of women in coaching, globally, is a well-documented issue and at the same time, from a UK perspective, it is well understood that the diversity and balance of our coaching workforces needs addressing. Indeed, it is named within the recent Coaching Plan for England strategy that one of the priorities for governing bodies is to improve capacity, capability and representation amongst our “coaching family” as well as the experience of sport for both participants and coaches (Sport England, 2016, p. 19). Nevertheless, this call for change has not led to a significant change. And by that, it is meant a long-lasting, deep-rooted change that ‘sticks’. Ultimately, change is slow because it requires a change in organizational culture: “the collective sum of beliefs, values, meanings and assumptions that are shared by a social group and that help to shape the ways in which they respond to each other and to their external environment” (Ogbonna & Harris, 2002, p. 34). In short, how sport organizations ideologically frame the issue of a lack of diversity, and what



they then understand to be the heart of the ‘problem’ of a lack of diversity remains the key to addressing this long-standing issue.

This area of research – linking organizational culture and the issue of gender (in)equity in coaching is a growing field, gathering more pace as the need becomes more urgent to get ‘under the skin’ to address the persistence of the problem of a lack of women in sport coaching and leadership (e.g. Doherty, Fink, Inglis, & Pastore, 2010; Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001; Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly, & Hooper, 2009; Norman et al., 2018; Shaw & Penney, 2003; Shaw & Slack, 2002; Spoor & Hoye, 2013). The issue of lack of diversity and being *inclusive* of this diversity within coaching workforces extends further than just an issue of representation. Rather, it is a question of organizational practices and processes that will affect all individuals within an organization, and negatively for those who do not fit within such a dominant culture.

The concept of ‘organizational fit’ is one often used in the business, leadership and management, and education literature but not one that has been utilised before in a sport research context (e.g. Cassell & Walsh, 1994; Kristof, 1996; Lindholm, 2003; Longman et al., 2018; Simpson, 2000). The term organizational fit, as defined by Cassell and Walsh (1994), is taken to refer to the level of comfort or discomfort experienced by women in their organizations. The culture of an organization, meaning its norms and values, create expectations and definitions of ideal behaviours (Simpson, 2000). An individual who is deemed to ‘fit’ within an organization is then someone who displays these behaviours and shares the cultural norms. Through applying such behaviour, they achieve organizational fit – whereby, they are comfortable within an organization’s culture (Simpson, 2000). Fit is the congruence between individuals and organizations, individuals and teams/groups, individuals to individuals and the interplay between organizational levels and organizational types (Ostroff & Schulte, 2012). In the present study, the focus was on person-organization fit

(rather than group or vocation fit) (Kristof, 1996). And more precisely, whether there is a “supplementary fit” between organizational culture, goals, values, and norms to an individual and their values, personality, goals, and attitudes (Kristof, 1996). Person-organizational fit relates the interests, values and abilities of an individual to associated features of an organization (Lindholm, 2003). Person-organizational fit is achieved when one entity provides the other with what it needs and / or they share fundamental characteristics (Kristof, 1996). However, it is often the case that women do not ‘fit’, in that what they offer and bring to an organisation as women is not valued or congruent with often a male-centred culture (Allen & Shaw, 2013; Burton, 2015; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2007; Norman et al., 2018; Strittmatter & Skirstad, 2017). The consequence is that women can then experience incompatibility or hostility within the workplace (Longman et al., 2018).

The concept of organizational fit also considers the significance of gender mix and balance within an organization (Ioakimidis & Antonopoulou, 2017; Simpson, 2000). Organizations with many women represented at middle and junior levels of management (akin to levels one and two of the coach developer pathway in this instance), and women at the senior levels, have more hospitable cultures and women experience a greater sense of organizational fit compared to those organizations in which the gender imbalance permeates every level of management (Ioakimidis & Antonopoulou, 2017; Simpson, 2000). This is an important note when considering organizational fit and women as coach developers in football, as the statistics demonstrate that the gender balance across the four levels of the pathway is bottom-heavy.

Research from other fields has concluded that women need to be in positions of power within an occupation for other women lower down the career chain, to experience organizational fit. For example, there needs to be women represented at every level of a career pathway, in this case – as coach developers, for women to generally ‘fit’ into an

organization and feel a sense of inclusion. This is rather than having one or two women that may lead to tokenistic roles in professions which are skewed in favour of men (Simpson, 2000). Being ‘tokens’ raises women’s visibility and thus the burden of representation they carry for women’s capabilities more generally. It also can increase a sense of ontological anxiety and ambiguity amongst the men within an organization (Puwar, 2004). The response is to draw more boundaries between dominant and subordinate groups to heighten the differences further between men and women (Kanter, 1977). Ultimately, whether certain social groups, in this case women, ‘fit’ within an organization depends on particular factors and conditions. One significant influence on organizational fit is the compatibility of *values* between the individual and the organization (Allen & Shaw, 2013; Cameron & Green, 2015; Kristof, 1996; Lindholm, 2003). There also needs to be a compatibility between the *needs* and *attributes* (i.e. what is expected from either the individual or the organization in terms of knowledge, skills, and ability) (Lindholm, 2003).

In sport, where the structures, systems, norms, environments, and relationships are primarily created and upheld by men, organizational cultures then tend to be defined along male norms (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). This becomes exacerbated by opaque recruitment patterns, such as assumed leadership or informal invitations that tend to characterise coaching appointments. Such patterns have been linked to the lack of female coaches or the lack of progression for female coaches demonstrated by the longitudinal research carried out by Acosta and Carpenter (2014). Their report on US collegiate sport showed that when an athletic director was a man, the percentage of women coaches appointed was lower than if the athletics director was a woman (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Kanter (1977) has described this as ‘homologous reproduction’; those in powerful positions appoint similar individuals to themselves. In this case, men appoint men. This is akin to ‘organizational fit’ whereby people are attracted to and selected by organizations whose goals are similar to their own. Given this

understanding, women as coach developers may find themselves experiencing many complexities within their work environments. But as yet, our understanding of whether women in these roles, a position in which the expectations, attributes, skills, and knowledges are required to be at ‘expert’ levels, experience similar or different complexities, is scarce (with the exception of Norman et al., 2018).

The aim of the present study was to examine what are the key factors that are likely to influence women’s sense of organizational fit as coach developers within an English footballing context where their numerical representation and the gender mix across the four levels of the coach developer pathway is poor and imbalanced. Part of the research was to also understand the degree of organizational fit according to the level at which the coach developers were on their pathway. This research represents the first work of its kind to address this role and how it is gendered within the wider context of an organizational culture. Moreover, often research that has addressed person-organizational fit has focused on this only at the point of recruitment. Very little work has examined this with individuals already in the organization and who have been in their roles for a period of time (Downes, Kristof-Brown, Judge, & Darnold, 2017). The specific focus of the present study was on the key cultural elements within the governing body’s work environment that promoted the women’s sense of organizational fit to draw lessons to increase diversity more generally amongst coaching workforces.

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

Much of what is at the heart of a culture will not be revealed in discussions by those who set the espoused values or determine the artefacts (Schein, 2004). Nor can organisational culture be measured (Schein, 2004). Therefore, this work is grounded in a pluralist

perspective; recognising the existence within organisations of diverse sub-cultures arising from factors such as professional affiliation, status, social or divisional interactions (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000). The work was based on a qualitative research design. To capture deeper levels of organisational culture and reveal basic assumptions, the research considered that in-depth interviews with the coach developers themselves, was essential.

## **Sample**

The study involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten female coach developers sampled from a list of 12 potential participants drawn from the 49 female coach developers within the organization. The list of coach developers were purposively sampled by contacts known to the research team, that is, they were deliberately chosen based on the purpose of answering the study's research questions and the important information they, in particular, could provide (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Participants were sampled on the basis of their availability to be interviewed, whether they were active coach developers at the time of research, based on informal conversations between the research team and the coach developers as to whether they would be interested to participate in the research, and on the basis that some of the participants had been identified as wanting to progress through the tutor pathway and possessed the potential to undertake the next stage of qualification as coach developers. Letters of information were initially emailed to all 12 potential participants, and for the ten coach developers who agreed to participate in the research, formal information letters and consent forms were sent prior to meeting. Six of the ten coach developers had completed their level one coach developer qualification and also held the UEFA B coaching licence (level three on the football coaching pathway). Three coach developers were level two coach developers and had also completed their coaching A license (level four of the coaching pathway). One additional coach developer was level three qualified and also held the UEFA pro coaching licence (the highest coaching award on the

coaching pathway). All of the coach developers were experienced coaches in either amateur or semi-professional clubs, regional training football centres, or as part of the English national women's teams, and all were active coach developers at the time of the interviews. Years of coach development experience ranged from two to 12 years. The participants self-reported their ethnicities as White British and all were non-disabled, a reflection of the lack of diversity, beyond just gender, amongst the UK coaching workforce in which 97% self-report as White and in which 92% define themselves as non-disabled (Sports Coach UK, 2012). The coach developers were aged between 22 and 50 years old. To protect anonymity and ensure confidentiality of participant responses, each participant provided their own pseudonym to be used in the reporting of the findings.

## **Method**

To capture the participants' experiences and to analyse, according to their accounts, what were the influences on their sense of organizational fit as coach developers, it was crucial to collect the first-hand stories of the coach developers. This provided rich accounts of the key factors that influenced the women's sense of inclusion within the governing body and gave a counter-narrative to what would have been offered by those who occupied privileged leadership positions within the organization. Analysing areas of culture will be revealed by those embedded in the organization, such as the participants who represent experienced coach developers, but who at the same time, were 'outsiders within' as underrepresented at all four levels of the coach developer pathway (Schein, 2004).

To collect their insights and experiences, in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with each coach developer (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The purpose of the interview was to elicit participant reflections and ask questions more broadly on the topic of organizational membership [fit] (Schein, 2009). To structure the interviews, an

interview guide was created for the purpose of the present study drawing upon previous research led by the author in this subject area, and grounded in Schein's foundational concept of underlying cultural assumptions within an organization and his guide on analysing culture (Schein, 2009). This prior gathering of data by the researcher and reading of literature that had utilised Schein's concept of underlying assumptions within qualitative research was collated and clustered together to create four overarching themes for the interview guide. These themes formed a logical, coherent structure to the interview whilst also allowing the opportunity to build rapport with the participant (for example, by asking background questions) and the possibility of gleaning new insights. The questions within the guide, generated by prior research and reading of literature using Schein's theory, were clustered under the following themes: (a) the participants background in and early experiences of coach development (e.g. 'How and why did you become active in and begin your route into coach development, within the context of your organization?'; (b) the experience of the coach developer and education training process (e.g. 'What support mechanisms enabled you to train to become a coach developer?'; (c) aspirations to remain and / or progress as coach developers (e.g. What are your ambitions for your future development in this role?'; and (d) women's relationships and sense of integration within the governing body, at both local and central levels, in terms of the wider agenda for supporting women in coaching and coach development (e.g. 'How well do you feel supported as a female coach developer within your organization?'). These questions were aimed towards contextualising the participants' experiences within their background and journey into the role, how these experiences were gendered, the degree to which they felt integrated within their organization, their experiences of what the cultural norms and practices within the organization were beyond what the governing body proclaim, and the subsequent impact on their daily experience within their role. Participants were also asked to elaborate on any further relevant information that arose

during the interview. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, and all were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

## **Data Analysis**

While the research did not take an explicitly feminist lens, gender was the central lens through which the participants' stories were interpreted. Feminist ethics of carrying out research also guided the project. The criterion for feminist research is "completeness, plausibility ...understanding and responsiveness to ... subjects' experiences" (Reinharz, 1983, p. 171). From these criteria, Olesen (2000) states that feminist qualitative researchers will seek to ensure their work is credible using "member validation techniques" (p. 230). One of the underpinning philosophies of the research then was to provide the opportunity for the coach developers to share their experiences and to provide a forum in which they could have their stories represented. An important part of the project was to provide a platform for the participants' experiences and therefore, to position the participants as being equal and the authority within the research process. One of the first steps in considering the participants in this way was to share the participant's interview transcript with them before any data analysis was carried out. Respondent validation allows a more active role for the participant within the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, it is acknowledged that even this approach increases another layer of co-construction between the researcher and the participants. This is because it is a technique situated within a realist ontological position and therefore, is concerned with knowing the 'truth' (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Instead, member 'reflections' on the transcript were invited with the coach developers (Tracy, 2010). As a result of this, the participants checked their interview transcript and no changes were noted.

Transcripts were analysed using the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although the method was originally developed for a grounded



theory approach, Lincoln and Guba (1985) added significant procedural details to the analytical technique and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) have since validated this as a standalone analytical technique for other types of analyses. Data was individually coded by the researcher leading the part of the project focusing on the role of women as coach developers. Analysis was then cross-checked across the wider research team, and agreement was reached as to the themes that arose during the first stage of analysis. The process of data analysis by involved separating each interview transcript into each of the individual responses. These were named ‘units of meaning’ and were then compared to other units of meaning to form groups of units containing shared themes. Such groups then formed categories and criterion of inclusion were proposed for each category. The writing of the rules of inclusion took the form of a statement of fact that conveyed the meaning contained within a category’s unit cards (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These statements then served as the outcome themes and concepts of the interviews. NVivo10, the qualitative data analysis software package was utilised to facilitate the process. Saturation was reached when new information or data no longer arose from the analysis, no further codes emerged, the links to other concepts could be described, and if desired, the study could have been replicated in future (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

## **Findings and Discussion**

The following sub-sections present the key and recurrent themes that emerged from analysis of the interviews with the women coach developers. These themes described the key factors that served to influence the degree of organizational fit that the participants experienced and that often acted as cultural barriers. As the first study of its kind with women as coach developers, this was crucial to understand what the pertinent issues were to then understand how and where to intervene. These cultural barriers were the return on investment from higher coaching qualifications; organizational support and nurturing; and opportunities

to progress and practice. Within each theme, it is discussed what these insights could mean towards improving the diversity of the coach developer workforce.

### **The incentive to progress: The return on investment from higher coaching qualifications**

Six of the ten coach developers interviewed were qualified at level one of the pathway. When asked during the interview as to why they had not progressed yet to level two, the response by all the participants was the requirement to possess the A-license coaching qualification (a requirement of being a level two coach developer). It was not necessarily the cost or time of this qualification or low pass rate per se that provided a barrier to the participants. These factors are often cited by organizations or governing bodies as simplistic reasons for a lack of women in coaching. Instead, the participants criticised the lack of opportunities to utilise this qualification as coaches because as women, they were not given the opportunities to work in professional men's clubs unlike their male counterparts, and therefore the only reason for applying to qualify for their A-license would be to progress as coach developers. In this way, the motivation to undertake the A-license was not found in many of the coach developers because of the lack of return on investment (ROI). The inflexibility of qualification criteria to progress meant that these women felt more outside of the organization due to not being able to move past level one. This was the case for Anna, who had been a level one coach developer for 12 years and repeated her frustration with being on the sidelines of the organization because she could not progress. She has now left the sport altogether:

If I want to continue my path up the coach developer pathway on the mainstream, I've got to do my A Licence. I've been a Centre of Excellence director, I didn't need it then, and I wouldn't do that job again... I enjoyed it, but it was a lot of stress... I'm

never going to get a job in a [men's] pro club, so I don't need it for that. So, I kind of sat back and thought, what's the point? ... But that's the barrier, I think, for some of the female [coach developers] ... unless you want to work in the women's game at a high level, there isn't a lot of reason to do an A Licence. ... I'm physically restricted at the moment, I can't go anywhere else with it ... I can't ...until [the governing body] move the goalposts.

Through analysis of the interviews, the lack of ROI from progression as both coaches and coach developers was cited as the most significant and consistent cultural barrier. Anna spoke at great length during her interview about the subsequent impact on her young family through her attempts to achieve greater 'fit' within her organization by climbing the coach developer pathway. For her, it was a gendered issue. For men, there is incentive to seek progression because there would be the professional opportunities to use it. But for her, as a female coach and developer, there was no motivation, and this provided the single most significant barrier to her career:

With [this] Level I, I know I can't go anywhere else with it, and that demotivates you. It's like, what's the point in me keep delivering this [coach education course], and I've done it for ... 12 years, in the guise of the same course, and I haven't gone anywhere with it...I can't go anywhere, I'm stuck. I'd love to be able to move up through the qualifying ... you know, that would be great reward...But I still have this feeling that there will be other people pushed forward to that first who've got the A Licence, and that most of the female tutors won't be in that category... I've completely lost motivation at the moment.

For Ruth, she felt that the lack of ROI presented a barrier for women that would be also detrimental to the governing bodies too:

I think ultimately [the governing body] might be kind of cutting their nose off to spite their face, because a lot of the female [coach developers] coaches have got their UEFA B and I don't think they probably want to get the UEFA A [in order to progress]....I think it's another hurdle and it's [one] that I certainly wouldn't go and jump, if I'm honest with you.

The rigidity of the qualification process for coach developers within this NGB affects the progression of women. It is a gendered issue because there is no return on investment for women to want to undertake these higher qualifications if such licenses are not as valuable as coaches. Therefore, as coach developers they remain on the bottom rung of the coach developer pathway and subsequently, are on the peripheral of the organization. To improve not only the representation but also the *progression* of women in coach development roles, the incentive to have the required qualifications and the transferability of these should be addressed. A more bespoke and flexible appointment system that considers the broader experience of the coach developer when seeking to progress is required. The evidence of the present study suggests that progression is in this case is disincentivised for women considering progressing as coach developers. The connection to the requirement for sometimes an empty qualification (the UEFA A license) deters women as coach developers and diminishes their sense of organizational fit because they do not progress to reach more senior roles. Thus, women remain as 'tokens' in lower qualified positions on the coach developer pathway and experience feeling constrained in their role. They do not then possess the social capital to manoeuvre their way into roles or networks of power or influence (Stumph & Sagas, 2005).

The impact could be a longer-lasting legacy than just the present participants. The lack of visible senior women in coach development roles means the workforce remain homogeneously white and male. Such a lack of flexibility creates dilemmas for women, in this

case as coach developers, whose only options are to either remain and stay put thus dampening their ambitions, or in the case of Anna, leave altogether (Moen, Lam, Ammons, & Kelly, 2013). It has been found that for women, ambition is often a precursor for advancement (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2017). This will also impact women as coaches too if there is a predominantly white male coach developer workforce who are responsible for their development and education, and a workforce of female coach developers who feel disincentivised and demotivated. By restricting the movement and progression of existing female coach developers, for women as coaches, there will also be lack of incentive to move into such roles because existing female coach developers are invisible or in lower qualified positions. It will appear not to be a role that is for women. Thus, it becomes a self-perpetuating cycle of women not seeing coach development as a role for them and thus not considering this as a career option. It also means that for women coaches that they will be taught by predominantly white men. While there has been previous literature that has documented women's aspirations to progress and advance, there has been little work that has shown how the organizational climate stimulates (or not) a sense of ambition for women (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2017). Rather than just being a psychological or individual issue, the present study contributes new knowledge as to how organizational cultures and subsequent structures can encourage (or discourage) women's ambitions.

In this way, women as coach developers are not "opting out", but rather being "pushed out" by inflexible job criterion imposed by the organization (Moen et al., 2013). What is of value through these stories is that the interviews revealed these women *did* want to progress as coach developers; they were ambitious. This concurs with previous research with female coaches that showed women's motivation and engagement levels in the role were higher than other professions (Norman, Didymus, & Rankin-Wright, 2016). Therefore, this contradicts some previous, and earlier, research that suggests that women do not possess the

same intent to remain or climb the ladder within sports coaching as men (in this case – we do not have the research from a coach development perspective) (e.g. Cunningham & Sagas, 2003; Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006). Instead, how organizations foster and nurture a climate that incentives women to want to advance is a concern.

### **Organizational support and nurturing**

The second most significant influence on women's sense of organizational fit as coach developers was the degree of support they received at both a local and national governing body level within their sport. The quality and consistency of continued professional development (CPD) afforded to the participants influenced how integrated a coach developer felt and the relationship they felt they had with the various levels of the organization. Providing CPD is symbolic of the will and commitment of an organization to develop and nurture their workforce. Yet, many of the women interviewed, particularly at the lower levels of the coach developer pathway, did not experience receiving appropriate CPD on a regular basis. As a result, this lack of provision served to disconnect and isolate them within the governing body. Isolation meant being outside of influential networks within the governing body, a lack of meaningful and consistent communication, and without consistent nurturing or development. The impact was a lack of valuable support. Anna was particularly critical towards the lack of nurturing of coach developers and interpreted this as a gendered situation. She understood the level of organizational support and nurturing to be gendered:

We as coach educators are asked to action-plan the candidates that come on our courses, we personalise it, we give them recommendations, we give them advice, we look at their progression, and we look to see how we can get them through the chain if that's what they want. That doesn't happen for us [coach developers]... And that seems restrictive...So that's limited me as well, the fact that I don't have an action

plan.... there's no personal approach to it. It's the nurturing thing... I think it's worse for females. I think quite clearly you identify the male tutors, because they potentially could move up into full-time roles.

In Anna's case, it is excluding her from organizational life, leading to an unsatisfactory 'fit' within her sport. For Dorothy, a level one coach developer but qualified to A license as a coach, she represented a part of the workforce that were at the start of the coach developer pathway but could be considered at the senior levels of the coaching ladder. She experienced less sense of organizational fit as a coach developer because she reported less direction and communication in her role as coach educator. This was in relation to accessing new CPD opportunities or resources:

There isn't...much guidance to...help you out... [It's not just] just telling you what to do, it's just maybe saying, "Well have a think about this more and that bit". So, it might be, "Oh, this book might help", you have to read a little bit or "Go and access this conference", or "Speak to this person", or "I really think you need to go and see the module one or two".

For some of the women interviewed, the lack of CPD and other forms of support both locally and nationally led to them feel a lack of sense of *nurturing* within the broader culture of the NGB. This demonstrates the connection between something tangible such as CPD, with a sense of feeling comfortable, recognised, and valued for women in sporting contexts. This was the case for both Julia (a level one coach developer), and Susan – a level two developer. Both experienced feeling on their 'own' and not a satisfactory 'fit' within the NGB and local NGB:

There wasn't a lot of support from the [central NGB] that I was aware of when I started tutoring... you go through a generic tutor training, you co-tutor a course with

someone and then that's it, you're left on your own... I do work for [in this county]. I don't really feel they have any involvement in what I do or really understand it... They don't really seem invested. (Julia)

You sort of become isolated within your own [local area]...although we work for them...we're not involved on the day-to-day running, we literally get a phone call, 'Can you do this course?' Yes is the answer, we collect the paperwork and we go and deliver it...So you work for them, but you're not really involved with them at all... [And] I think,[the central NGB], they need to get involved a little bit more. (Susan).

The accounts highlight these coach developers as feeling on the peripheral of both their local and national governing bodies.

Other mechanisms by which an individual can feel integrated into their workplace is the pay and reward given to them. This was an issue for coach developers and served to influence their organizational fit – the sense of whether they felt they belonged and felt valued within the organization. This is because some of the participants suggested their degree of organizational fit would be higher through a sense of feeling rewarded, if their value was demonstrated through more appropriately remunerated and secure contracts. However, because of the lack of professionalisation within the women's game, there are limited opportunities to find paid opportunities as coach developers, as Anna describes:

The coach education ... previously, they were a bit lax with the support with it ... more recently they're getting a lot more things in line, more contracts, things are more professional. It wasn't done professionally; it was all a bit ad hoc... I don't think they value the [coach developers] as important as they actually are, because without their tutors, they don't get a lot of their targets or a lot of their work done...We're not employed on a permanent basis... it's casual work... and there [are] issues around



how you're paid, you're not on a contract, there's no sick-pay and holiday-pay, so you're kind of just seen as an ad hoc kind of casual worker... I think because you're not employed fully with them, and you're ad hoc casual, there's this kind of [attitude]: "we don't have that much of a responsibility for you; you don't fit within our figures so why do we need to do that?"

The findings discussed in this sub-section regarding the level of organizational support and nurture experienced by the coach developers resonates with previous research with female coaches that has found women are not ascribed the value and reward that recognises their contribution to their profession (Norman, 2008, 2012a; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016). Some of this previous research has linked this to gender and age, in relation to coaching (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016). Other work has found this with female coaches who identify from Black or Minoritized Ethnic groups (Allen & Shaw, 2009; Norman, Hylton, Flintoff, North, & Rankin-Wright, 2014; Rankin-Wright, Hylton, & Norman, 2017). Job security has also been shown to often be a gendered issue for coaches working within women's sports (Kubayi, Coopoo, & Morris-Eyton, 2017). The present study adds to this existing body of literature by concluding that women also experience these varying degrees of organizational support as coach *developers*, and support is dependent on where they are on the pathway of that profession.

To incentivise individuals to want to pursue a career in coach development, an organization must offer the appropriate levels of support and reward. Pay and employment contracts are evidence of worth and are reflections of equality within an organization (Acker, 2006). An organization cannot be equal where there are systemic disparities between participants in their sense of control over their career, resources, opportunities for professional development, security in employment, or pay and other rewards (Acker, 2006).

Continued Professional Development (CPD) is a mechanism of advancement. Therefore, if it is not available or offered on an ad-hoc basis, women within the organization, across all coaching roles, will be poorer for it. Where such disparities exist, they are reflections of deeper inequalities in the way an organization works. The impact is poorer job security for coach developers, poorer job satisfaction, lower wellbeing, and ultimately, and lower retention and progression of women in such positions (Norman et al, 2016). To understand how employees are valued in the form of pay or contracts, the systems by which jobs are appointed and salary awarded require scrutiny (Acker, 2006). Along with a focus on the addressing the rigidity of the qualification process as a way of increasing diversity amongst coach developers (as discussed earlier in the findings), the way these individuals are professional developed and rewarded should also be considered. These inequality-producing mechanisms (Acker, 2006) rest upon a disparity between what the organization values, to what the coach developers bring to the role. Person-organizational fit depends upon the compatibility of values between the individual and the organization (Kristof, 1996). It is evident from these women's accounts that they are not ascribed the merit they warrant as coach developers. The skills and attributes that many women bring to an organization is not what is expected or valued by an NGB. Therefore, while there is a current trend and drive within the governing body to recruit more women in coach development roles, the sustainability of women in these positions long-term is questionable given that the mechanisms by which advancement and rewards can be attained, are not present.

### **The opportunity to progress or practice as coach developers**

A theme that arose from the interviews with the women was that there appears to be no transparent process by which coach developers are chosen to deliver courses. The opportunities to practice as coach developers are also ad hoc and difficult to come by. For

many of the participants, this is a gendered issue because they, as women, are often outside of networks of power and influence to learn about opportunities to lead courses. Gender shapes organizational fit and how integrated these women feel within their governing body because it then influences (and in many cases, limits) the opportunity to be *visible* within the NGB. For Grace, a level one coach developer who had begun her level two qualification at the time of the research, the lack of opportunities to practice as a coach developer were limited. She attributed this to partly the location of the local governing body in which she worked, but primarily Grace considered the opportunities to practice was a gendered issue:

In regards to the next step up [it] is coach educator for the [men's] professional game and there's no female in that, but there's some females that just are as qualified as the men that are doing that job. But it's still seen that it wouldn't be right for a woman to go into, say for instance, [the local professional club] and deliver their coach education programme, because she wouldn't get the respect.

Grace's quote highlights that the exclusion of women in the men's game is limiting coach development opportunities for women. Therefore, they are restricted to women's football, a sport that does not yet have the financial maturity to offer full-time paid employment. Susan, as a more senior coach developer, shared Grace's experiences and argued that the local and central NGB's opaque method of selecting coach developers was harming her career development, a career that had taken years to begin:

I had probably about a four year wait to actually train up to be a coach developer, although I was qualified in the coaching sense to do it there just wasn't many opportunities [for coach developers], which was quite frustrating... You don't hear [of] many opportunities actually arising... there's only a handful of tutors that they [the NGB] seem to be hand-picking and hand-selecting...I don't hear of anything... the

reason why I went and did my coaching badges was basically to progress up the tutoring ladder, but I think I'm realistic in knowing that it's not going to be happening, I've probably got as high in my tutoring as I'm going to, you know, Level 2, because I don't think the opportunities will be there.

Ruth expressed her frustration at the time it took for her too to gain the opportunities to deliver coach education:

You might have to wait a couple of years or whatever for somebody to pull out [and leave a coach developer role] or for somebody to say, "Do you know what? I don't want to do it anymore"...I know that most people who are doing the coach education want to stay in it and they're not going to give it up any time soon....I think that maybe is a little bit of a shame, because how are more people, females, going to get the opportunity?

The process of selecting coach developers and retaining them is a gendered, cultural issue. From the accounts of the participants, it is an issue of power – who has it and who determines who is let into these closed circles. Whether an individual fits this circle is because they have the 'ideal' characteristics that are desired within that network, based on notions of what makes, in this case, a good coach developer (Longman et al., 2018). Some feelings of discomfort were experienced by the participants, which related to feelings of being 'different' and not fitting in within the club or governing body. The consequences are then tangible because of this patriarchal culture – many women do not have access to the networks that facilitate career progression, the opportunity to practice, or just to have the support in what can be an isolating role. This was the experience for Samantha, one of the few female level two coach developers:

To be let into that boys' club (because I just think there is this stuff going on for females)... I don't know how the hell you're meant to access it... There are women working in coach education [but] I don't know how, if their face fits it gets in there, whereas I found it notoriously difficult...to get in. Any of that support, I haven't managed to get it...[if] your face doesn't fit, and it just seems to be that all the time... if you're not one of them... I don't really know what the magic wand is to get yourself in there. It doesn't seem to be equitable, fair...it's not about your qualifications, your experiences and how you can be a good coach [developer].

Samantha's quote is revealing of what is necessary to fit into this organization. As she describes, it is not about an individual having the correct qualifications or experience. Rather, it is more cultural; it is whether you 'fit' into the organization in terms of gender and behaviours and attitudes that align with the organization. The culture of the NGB was also revealed in its practice of hosting courses and training for coach developers. Some of the participants cited the inflexibility of the schedule and location of programmes. This affected women in particular because they did not often work in paid, full-time roles within football and therefore, were required to take annual leave to attend courses that were held at the English national football centre. For Sylvia, this prevented her from undergoing training or further qualification as a coach developer to move beyond level one:

They seem to be quite inflexible in that [the courses are] always there [at the national football centre] and it's always that [particular] time...I've missed out on a few things ...there's no point in me applying because I'm not going to get to the training. Or, it's bad timing...it's not as easy to get time off. You are restricted as to when you can do things... [the courses] weren't weekends; they were during the week, so I couldn't go.

[The course leader] said, ‘Oh, yes, come and jump in on it, it’ll be fine, and then you can pick it up’, but no, I couldn’t.

The work requirements of coach developers vary across governing bodies and across sports. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study support previous research in arguing that the work requirements within coach development are organised on the image of someone who has a paid role within the sport, has no other responsibilities for family or children beyond being the wage earner, and who is totally dedicated to the job (Acker, 2006; Allen & Shaw, 2013; Norman, 2008). Total focus on the job, continuous working and travelling away from home, and long hours if requested are all expectations that incorporate the image of the coach developer (Acker, 2006). For women qualified at level one but with aspirations to climb the coach developer pathway, there is little flexibility to shape or change these expectations (Acker, 2006).

Societal culture still expects women who have children, to be the primary caregiver and so, women often have greater obligations than just to earn a living. Deviating from this ideal can mean women are not made to feel included within the workplace (Longman et al., 2018). The present findings suggest in English football, there are boundaries placed around women to remain within the ‘women’s game’. That is where they ‘fit’ in the eyes of many governing bodies. But the opportunities to progress or to gain paid coach developer roles are scarce, particularly for women, within women’s football. This is due to the lack of professionalisation within the women’s game which limits growth and thus the number of paid opportunities within football (Norman & McGoldrick, 2018). This perpetuates the inequalities within organizations because women cannot reach positions to become more visible across the organization more broadly or to be able to shape expectations around work requirements (Acker, 2006). The present study highlights the struggles that women at the

lower levels of the coach developer pathway experience in attempting to fit within an organization, a finding that is congruent with previous research that has documented women's difficulties in the formative years of their careers due to the constraints of the work environment (Helgesen, 2017; Simpson, 2000). This is because the structure of work in sport organizations remains largely designed on the norms and realities of an all-male workforce (Helgesen & Johnson, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to examine women's sense of integration and inclusion within English football in a role that is responsible for educating and training the football coaching workforce. The concept of organizational fit underpinned the research, that is, the level of comfort or discomfort women experience within a workplace and its culture. Women's experiences as coach developers have not been addressed in the research literature. From the findings, there are a number of key messages to emerge. First, there are varying degrees of organizational fit according to the level at which women are on the coach developer pathway. This pathway is bottom-heavy when considering the representation and spread of women in these roles. Most female coach developers are qualified to level one and their experiences at this level lead them to feel less of a sense of organizational fit than more senior coach developers. This over-representation of women at this lower level is then perhaps not a matter of choice, but the present study suggests that there is a sense of resignation amongst some of these women or a feeling of being "pushed out". The culture and structure of the work environment do not support the ambitions or intentions of the women to climb the career ladder. From the accounts of the women interviewed, there is no shortage of motivation to progress; rather, there is not the *choice* to do so due to the restrictive structure and expectations of the work environment.

Such differential structures limit women's advancement and serve to perpetuate ideas regarding women's capabilities and ambitions (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Institutional practices such as holding qualification courses during the week may appear gender neutral, but they are built on the ideals of male workers (Ely & Meyerson, 2010). The qualification process, as discussed by the participants, is neither attractive nor facilitative. What is important is the *meaning* of undertaking further qualification for women. If there is little return on investment on qualifications in the way of the opportunity to practice at a higher level, there is little meaning to seek progression. This finding agrees with past research which has found that the investment in development opportunities does not merit the outlay in time and effort because for women, there is little support following this process (Norman et al., 2018). If work environments, such coach development, are based on male ideals and norms, this restricts women's progression and creates a level of discomfort for them within the organization, thus diminishing their sense of organizational fit. Specifically, the concept of organizational fit seems to be a key factor in job satisfaction (Longman et al., 2018). Where there is little fit or a sense of disconnect in the present study, there were cases of women leaving the organization (in the case of Anna for example), or at least a tangible sense of dissatisfaction in the role.

As discussed in the opening sections of the paper, the degree of person-organizational fit is determined by the compatibility between an individual's and an organization's needs and attributes, as well as values (Lindholm, 2003). This means that individuals and an organization must share fundamental characteristics, and one entity must provide what the other needs, or both (Kristof, 1996). In the present study, the evidence shows that within an English football context, more must be to provide what female coach developers need, and value what they bring to the governing bodies. Greater value must be ascribed to female coach developers. This should be shown through a more flexible qualification pathway (one



that pays attention to gender [Ely & Meyerson, 2010]), a greater level of support to connect qualifications to paid employment opportunities, better pay and reward, consistent and personalised communication, greater efforts put towards connecting coach developers to others and to the organization, and more broadly, support towards the professionalisation of women's football to increase the number of paid opportunities for those working in the sport.

Changes to the work environment must be on the inequality-producing mechanisms of a governing body, not the outcome of these, such as a lack of representation or progression of female coach developers (Acker, 2006). The quality of structural support plays an important role in an individual's appraisal of how well they fit into a workplace (Lindholm, 2003). The present study concludes that gender is a determinant of organizational fit because it underpins the values and needs of both the individual and the organization. It is also within the interests of the organization to address what it expects and values from its workforce, and how it determines who 'fits' the model of the ideal coach developer. All individuals, including all different groups of men and women, may find it difficult to conform to these idealised images or work within rigid, restrictive work environments (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). For the governing body itself, their existing, unequal practices may suppress a broader range of coach developer styles and approaches which might improve the organization in being able to deliver to a growingly diverse participant base as well as its core activities (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

The value of the present study is also in broadly highlighting some of the cultural influences which may serve to 'push' female coaches away from an organization and thus decrease their sense of fit, motivation, and ambition (Longman et al., 2018). An organization's culture can either propel women away from its core and diminish their willingness to want to progress, or it can draw women closer to the organization and increase their desire to want to remain and advance (Longman et al., 2018). The accounts of the

women interviewed gave evidence of some of the organizational policies and practices that are serving to push women away from the governing body. Future research must take a 'deeper dive' to shine a spotlight on the structure, expectations, and culture within the work environments of sports organization, and connect these to a lack of inclusion of underrepresented groups within coach (developer) workforces.

An intersectional lens must also be taken when interrogating organizational culture for how it affects individuals. More knowledge and evidence is required as to understand difference within underrepresented groups in recognition that while women are often marginalised, there are further notions of difference that interplay with gender, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or (dis)ability, to oppress some groups of women further (Carter-Francique & Olushola, 2016; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017). It is acknowledged as a limitation of the research that there is little diversity amongst the sample of (White, non-disabled) participants thus limiting any discussion of intersectionality. The present study builds on the small body of literature that connects female coaches' personal experiences to the cultural conditions in which they work and calls for greater research that adds a further layer to this to understand how these experiences are then 'stratified' by other forms of difference. More is also known as to men's experiences of this role as well as other sport in order to make gendered and contextual comparisons.

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